

EPSTEIN FILES

Under fire for Epstein ties, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick defends visiting his private island

Lutnick said in an interview last year that he “was never in the room” with Epstein other than a 2005 visit to his apartment.



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Lutnick admits to visiting Epstein's island but assures there was nothing 'untoward'

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By **Rebecca Shabad**

Facing bipartisan criticism over his ties to Jeffrey Epstein, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick on Tuesday said that he had no personal relationship with Epstein but acknowledged visiting the

late convicted sex offender's island while on a family vacation in 2012.

"I did not have any relationship with him. I barely had anything to do with that person, OK?" Lutnick said during a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing focused on broadband funding.

Lutnick's relationship with Epstein has come under intense scrutiny in recent days since his name appeared in a number of [Epstein files recently released](#) by the Justice Department. So far, the White House has stood by him.

In October, Lutnick characterized his connection as limited, but in light of the newly publicly documents, he's now facing calls – mostly from Democrats – to resign as Cabinet secretary. Lutnick previously led Cantor Fitzgerald as chairman and CEO.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., the subcommittee's ranking member, made clear in his opening statement that he wanted to use the hearing to question Lutnick about Epstein. Lutnick has not been accused of wrongdoing in connection with Epstein but has faced criticism for not being more transparent about their interactions.

"The issue is not that you engaged in any wrongdoing in connection with Jeffrey Epstein, but that you totally misrepresented the extent of your relationship with him to the Congress, to the American people, and to the survivors of his despicable criminal and predatory acts," Van Hollen said Tuesday.

"The files show that you had interactions with Epstein over the next 13 years, including long after he was convicted in 2008 of soliciting the prostitution of a minor," Van Hollen added.

Lutnick confirmed that he met Epstein when he moved to a house next door to him in New York.

"I met him then," Lutnick told lawmakers. "Over the next 14 years, I met him two other times that I can recall – two times."

Asked whether he visited Epstein's private island in the Caribbean in 2012, Lutnick said he had lunch with Epstein on his island during a family vacation that December.

"My wife was with me, as were my four children and nannies. I had another couple with, they were there as well, with their children, and we had lunch on the island – that is true – for an hour," he said.

Lutnick said there was nothing “untoward” about the interaction but did not recall why they did it.

Asked Tuesday if the White House was standing by Lutnick following the hearing, press secretary Karoline Leavitt said, “Secretary Lutnick remains a very important member of President Trump’s team, and the president fully supports the secretary.”

Responding to questions from Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., Lutnick said he met Epstein “three times over 14 years,” and added, “I have done absolutely nothing wrong in any possible regard.”

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., said during the hearing that people are bothered “because last year, you said you had cut off all contact, but there are eight incidences of interaction in the files after 2005.”

Referring to Lutnick's 2012 visit to Epstein’s island with his family, Merkley said, “You were planning a trip to the private island with your family. That sounds like somebody you know well enough to call up and say, ‘Let’s get our families together, let’s visit each other.’”

Since the Epstein documents became public, the commerce secretary said that he looked through them for any mention of himself. “I looked through the millions of documents for my name, just like everybody else. And what I found was there was a document that says that I had a meeting with him, in May, I think, for an hour, at 5 o’clock,” Lutnick said.

One of the emails showed that Epstein had drinks planned with Lutnick in May 2011 at 5 p.m.

Lutnick described his first meeting with Epstein during [an interview on the “Pod Force One with Miranda Devine”](#) in October 2025. Lutnick explained that he and his wife toured Epstein’s New York City home soon after they moved into their house. One room had a massage table in the middle with candles around, said Lutnick, who added that he asked Epstein why it was there. That’s when, he suggested, Epstein used sexual innuendo.

Lutnick said he and his wife quickly excused themselves and left Epstein’s home. “And in the six to eight steps it takes to get from his house to my house, my wife and I decided that I will never be in the room with that disgusting person ever again.”

“I was never in the room with him socially, for business, or even philanthropy,” he added. “If that guy was there, I wasn’t going ‘cause he’s gross. So I look back at it as a gift. He gave me a gift.”

A growing number of Democrats have called on Lutnick to resign from his Cabinet position as his relationship with Epstein comes under intense scrutiny. Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., who co-authored the bill to release the Justice Department's Epstein files, also called on Lutnick to step down.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, criticized people like Lutnick on Monday who have claimed to have had few interactions with Epstein.

"Do I have concerns about it? Yeah, yeah," Murkowski said, "Particularly, if they're people that have said didn't know the man, never went to that place, you know? And now, now we're seeing evidence otherwise, it just causes me to question the credibility and the integrity of the individual, they've lied."

Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., is among the Democrats calling on Lutnick to resign. In a statement Monday, Schiff said the commerce secretary "lied" to Americans about his connection to Epstein.

The White House on Monday defended Lutnick against the blowback.

"President Trump has assembled the best and most transformative Cabinet in modern history. The entire Trump administration, including Secretary Lutnick and the Department of Commerce, remains focused on delivering for the American people," White House spokesman Kush Desai said.

Last week, a reporter asked President Donald Trump about the Epstein files, noting that Lutnick is among the president's allies who have appeared in the records. Asked whether he had read the new files, Trump said, "I didn't. ... I'm sure they're fine. Otherwise, there would have been major headlines." 📺



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— Frank Thorp V contributed.
